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Judith Plomp Maria Tims Jos Akkermans Svetlana N. Khapova Paul G.W. Jansen Arnold B. Bakker

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# Career competencies and job crafting

## How proactive employees influence their well-being

Judith Plomp, Maria Tims, Jos Akkermans,  
Svetlana N. Khapova and Paul G.W. Jansen

*Department of Management and Organization, VU Amsterdam,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and*

Arnold B. Bakker

*Center of Excellence for Positive Organizational Psychology,  
Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to bring together job design and career theory in the examination of how proactive employees optimize their well-being (i.e. job satisfaction and perceived health) through job crafting and career competencies. This study offers an integrated account of the pathway from proactive personality to well-being.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data were collected by a cross-sectional self-report survey study among 574 employees working in various organizations.

**Findings** – The results of structural equation modeling analyses supported the proposed double mediation model: job crafting and career competencies both mediated the positive relationship between proactive personality and well-being. The findings suggest that proactive employees can enhance their well-being both through proactive job redesign and the development of career-related skills and abilities.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study precludes causal explanations. Future research should further investigate the role of employee proactivity related to contemporary work topics, including temporary contracts and self-employment.

**Practical implications** – Managers and HR practitioners can optimize employee well-being by focusing on HR policies related to job redesign, as well as investing in training and development of career competencies.

**Originality/value** – This paper integrates two research domains by exploring how proactive employees take a proactive stance toward their job as well as their career, and investigates how this proactive approach contributes to their well-being. In addition, the authors demonstrated a link between the development of career competencies and employee health.

**Keywords** Well-being, Job crafting, Proactive personality, Career competencies

**Paper type** Research paper

A healthy workforce is key to sustaining an effective and innovative organization (Schulte and Vainio, 2010). Traditionally, scholars have proposed a job design approach, in which managers (re)design jobs for employees to foster employee well-being, motivation, and performance. A job is well-designed if it is characterized by sufficient job resources and challenging demands, such as autonomy, task significance, and feedback (Oldham and Hackman, 2010). However, due to changes in the organizational environment, such as the emergence of flexible work arrangements, self-managing teams, and temporary contracts, a new perspective on job (re)design has



emerged, which focuses on employee proactivity. This self-directed approach can be seen as a bottom-up perspective, in which employees themselves actively shape and alter the scope of their job (Bindl and Parker, 2011).

Particularly employees with a proactive personality are better able to maintain their work-related well-being by proactively shaping their job to better fit their personal needs (Bakker *et al.*, 2012). In addition to such active job shaping, scholars acknowledge the increasing need for self-managing one's career, especially due to the unpredictable and fast changing work environment (King, 2004). Combining these insights, employees with a proactive disposition are expected to engage in proactive behaviors that promote self-management at both the job and the career level.

An important form of proactivity focused on the job level is job crafting, which refers to self-initiated behaviors aimed at changing the scope of one's job tasks and/or interactions with others (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Research has shown that job crafting is related to beneficial work outcomes, including work engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Ghitulescu, 2007). Proactivity at the career level refers to the development of career competencies (Akkermans *et al.*, 2013a). A career is defined as a sequence of an individual's work experiences over time (Arthur *et al.*, 1989) and career competencies entail an accumulation of career-related skills, knowledge, and abilities that are associated with career progress (Akkermans *et al.*, 2013a). In addition, both job crafting and career competencies have been linked to work engagement and burnout, which are important aspects of employee well-being (Akkermans *et al.*, 2013b; Tims *et al.*, 2013).

Given their shared predictors and outcomes, it is not surprising that research has been called for to connect contemporary job and career design literatures. Hall and Las Heras (2010) argue that for too long, jobs and careers have been treated as unconnected research domains. They advocate a more integrated approach of job design and career theory and urge scholars to examine how important topics in these fields are related to each other. To illustrate, Akkermans and Tims (in press) recently demonstrated that both career competencies and job crafting were related to subjective career success, thereby providing support for Hall and Las Heras's argument. With the purpose of gaining a richer perspective on the possible twofold benefits of a proactive disposition, we explore how proactive employees enhance their well-being through both a job- and a career-related process.

In conclusion, with this paper we aim to uncover the roles of job crafting and career competencies as the mediating mechanisms in the relationship between proactive personality and employee well-being. The choice of these mechanisms is in line with the recent literature that suggests that both proactive work behaviors and career-related proficiency are important determinants of employees' well-being.

### **Employee well-being and proactive personality**

Employee well-being refers to the evaluation of the overall quality of experiences and functioning of an employee. Research has demonstrated that employee well-being plays a fundamental role in the success of an organization, as it is an important predictor of employee productivity, absenteeism, and turnover (Grant *et al.*, 2007). In this study, we included job satisfaction and perceived health as indicators of well-being, because these are considered important components of well-being (Blanchflower and Oswald, 1999).

Despite the idea that all individuals experience the innate psychological need for control, some individuals are more inclined to actually take control and are more proactive by nature. Proactive personality is defined as a personal disposition

concerning the general tendency to directly alter one's environment, which includes identifying opportunities and taking initiative (Bateman and Crant, 1993). Moreover, proactive personality plays an important role in the improvement of employee well-being (e.g. Crant, 2000) and is related to job satisfaction, work engagement (Bakker *et al.*, 2012), and employee life satisfaction (Greguras and Diefendorff, 2010). Although the association between employee proactivity and well-being has been well-established, less is known about how they are related, considering that a tendency to be proactive does not capture what actions individuals undertake that enhance their well-being. To better understand this process, we investigate to what extent the proactivity – well-being relationship is mediated by job crafting and career competencies.

### **Proactive personality and well-being: the mediating role of job crafting**

Individuals with a proactive personality are more likely to challenge the status quo or take actions to (re)gain control (Crant, 2000). Several studies have shown that proactive personality is linked to actual proactive behavior. For instance, Becherer and Maurer (1999) found that proactive personality was directly related to entrepreneurial behaviors, such as starting a new business. Additionally, Bakker *et al.* (2012) found that proactive personality is an important antecedent of job crafting.

Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) defined job crafting as “the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work” (p. 179). A more recent approach of job crafting uses the job demands-resources (JD-R) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) theory to describe job crafting behaviors. According to JD-R theory, job characteristics are classified as either job demands or job resources. Job demands refer to job aspects that require physical or cognitive effort from the employee and are associated with negative health outcomes (e.g. burnout) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are aspects of the job that help employees attain their work goals, learn new skills, and deal with job demands (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Based on this framework, Tims and Bakker (2010) described job crafting as the changes employees make on their own initiative in their levels of job demands and/or job resources. Tims *et al.* (2012) differentiated four dimensions of job crafting: increasing structural job resources (e.g. mobilizing autonomy and developmental opportunities), increasing social job resources (e.g. mobilizing social support and feedback), increasing challenging job demands (e.g. taking on new projects), and decreasing hindering job demands (e.g. avoiding emotionally straining tasks).

In line with our argument that proactive personality is likely to be related to job crafting, Bakker *et al.* (2012) indeed showed that proactive personality is an important antecedent of job crafting. Because employees with a proactive personality are generally inclined to take initiative independent from the specific context (e.g. during social events, emergencies, in personal relationships), individuals with a proactive personality are also more likely to engage in job crafting behaviors, such as seeking job resources and challenges. Furthermore, Tims *et al.* (2013a, b) showed that employees who crafted their job resources, also reported an increase in these resources over time. These findings show that through job crafting, employees can change their job characteristics. We expect that particularly employees with a proactive personality will be successful in affecting changes because they are inclined to respond in a proactive manner. In sum, we hypothesize the following:

*H1.* Proactive personality is positively related to job crafting.

Additionally, we aim to further uncover the mechanisms underlying the relationship between proactive personality and well-being by investigating how proactive employees improve both their job satisfaction and health through job crafting.

First, based on JD-R theory, access to sufficient job resources protects employees against high job demands, as well as strain and burnout, and simultaneously promotes work engagement (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, we reason that by means of job crafting, employees search for and expand their pool of job resources. In turn, these attained job resources form a buffer against high job demands and are related to higher levels of well-being. Second, conservation of resources (COR) theory states that individuals are inclined to maintain and accumulate their current pool of resources to form a buffer against high job demands (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). As such, through altering their job resources, employees can proactively optimize and guard their own well-being. Once employees have gained more job resources, they are inclined to further increase these resources in order to stay satisfied and healthy (Hobfoll, 2002). By altering their work characteristics, employees can influence important job characteristics, such as autonomy and feedback, which, in turn, are found to be important predictors of daily well-being (Reis *et al.*, 2000). Hence, we argue that employees with a proactive personality will experience higher levels of well-being because they are more inclined to proactively craft their job:

*H2.* Job crafting is positively related to (a) job satisfaction and (b) perceived health.

*H3.* Job crafting mediates the relationship between proactive personality and (a) job satisfaction and (b) perceived health.

### **Proactive personality and well-being: the mediating role of career competencies**

In addition to being important for managing one's job, proactivity is also relevant for managing one's career. A meta-analysis by Fuller and Marler (2009) indicated that proactive personality is related to objective and subjective career success, as well as to employability-related outcomes, including career self-efficacy and learning orientation. Furthermore, proactive personality is linked to a sense of personal responsibility for one's career and facilitates the building of social networks (Hall *et al.*, 1996). As such, proactivity plays an important role in taking responsibility for one's career progress. One way for employees to actually get in control of fulfilling their career needs and goals is by the development of career competencies.

Career competencies concern the acquired career-related knowledge, skills, and abilities aimed to achieve certain career goals (Akkermans *et al.*, 2013a). Recently, Akkermans *et al.* (2013a) reviewed the literature on career-related competencies, and presented an integrative theoretical framework consisting of three career competencies dimensions. First, reflective career competencies address the degree of awareness of and personal reflections on the career. For example, the reflection on one's strengths and limitations, but also on one's motivation and passion concerning their career. Second, communicative career competencies focus on effective communication with others and making use of one's professional network and being able to demonstrate one's strengths to significant others. For instance, knowing how and whom to approach for a career advancement. Last, behavioral career competencies entail setting goals, and exploring career opportunities and learning. For example, the pursuit of an education to become a specialist in a work-related area.

Seibert *et al.* (2001) suggested that proactive employees take active control over their environment to advance their careers. Additionally, proactive employees seek for ways to improve their career by calling upon their professional network (Thompson, 2005) or engaging in development programs (Major *et al.*, 2006). We reason that proactive employees are more likely to develop career competencies, because they are inclined to actively reflect, make use of their connections, and generate career-related opportunities. Hence, proactive personality may translate in proactive career-related behaviors that instigate the development of career competencies:

*H4.* Proactive personality is positively related to career competencies.

In addition, Akkermans *et al.* (2013b) demonstrated that career competencies function in a similar way as personal resources so that they instigate a motivational process. To clarify, personal resources are related to resilience and one's ability to control and influence the environment, including self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2003). Personal resources improve personal growth and development and, based on COR theory, individuals are inclined to expand this pool of resources and in turn protect and optimize their well-being (Hobfoll, 2002; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). Akkermans *et al.* (2013b) reasoned that career competencies are closely related to personal resources, because career competencies are also focused on the evaluation of one's ability to control and have an impact on one's environment in order to achieve certain goals. For example, having a clear sense of one's motivation and qualities may enhance one's self-concept and, similar to personal resources, protects employees against high demands and exhaustion, and as such increases employee well-being. Indeed, Akkermans *et al.* (2015) and Akkermans and Tims (in press) provided further evidence that career competencies are closely related to personal resources and function in a similar way. In addition, Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007) demonstrated that personal resources are associated with job-related efficacy and optimism, and in turn with work engagement and decreased levels of exhaustion.

Taken together, we argue that employees with a proactive personality are inclined to undertake actions needed to achieve career-related goals and as such develop relevant career-related skills and abilities (i.e. career competencies). Sequentially, we expect that career competencies function as personal resources, which are associated with enhanced self-concept and higher employee resilience, and in turn are related to increased well-being:

*H5.* Career competencies are positively related to (a) job satisfaction and (b) perceived health.

*H6.* Career competencies mediate the relationship between proactive personality and (a) job satisfaction and (b) perceived health.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Data were collected through the networks of the researchers. Employees were invited to participate in the online study and received a link to the questionnaire. Because this study was part of a research project that primarily focused on the work and careers of young employees, participant age ranged between 16 and 30. However, job crafting and career competencies seem to be especially important for young employees at the beginning of their career. Young employees in particular may benefit from proactive behaviors and the development of career-related abilities, because they are less

adjusted to the organizational environment and are confronted more with unemployment and difficult working conditions (Akkermans *et al.*, 2009).

We collected data of 574 respondents, employed in the Netherlands and Germany. The sample consisted of 354 (61.70 percent) females. The average age of the respondents was 25.59 years (SD = 4.21). Participants worked on average 33.29 hours per week (SD = 10.73) and 2.11 years for their current organization (SD = 2.12). Participants worked in different occupational fields, including the financial and business sector (33.10 percent), cultural sector (11.70 percent), healthcare (10.50 percent), government services (9.60 percent), and trade sector (8.20 percent). The majority of participants had completed a higher professional or scientific education (80.20 percent).

### *Measures*

Proactive personality was measured with a Dutch translation of the six-item version of Bateman and Crant's (1993) proactive personality scale. An example item of this scale is: "If I see something I do not like, I fix it." Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.77.

Job crafting was measured with the job crafting scale developed by Tims *et al.* (2012). The job crafting scale measures four dimensions of job crafting using 21 items. Each of the scales includes five items, with the exception of "decreasing hindering job demands," which consists of six items. The four scales are "increasing structural job resources" (e.g. "I try to develop my capabilities",  $\alpha = 0.78$ ), "increasing social job resources" (e.g. "I ask others for feedback on my job performance",  $\alpha = 0.79$ ), "increasing challenging job demands" (e.g. "If there are new developments, I am one of the first to learn about them and try them out",  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), and "decreasing hindering job demands" (e.g. "I try to ensure that my work is emotionally less intense",  $\alpha = 0.78$ ). Respondents could indicate how often they engaged in each of the behaviors on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Career competencies were assessed with the 21-item Career Competencies Questionnaire (Akkermans *et al.*, 2013a). Reflective career competencies were assessed with seven items (e.g. "I know my strengths in my work",  $\alpha = 0.81$ ). Communicative career competencies were measured with seven items (e.g. "I know how to ask for advice from members of my network",  $\alpha = 0.81$ ). Behavioral career competencies were also assessed with seven items ("I can actively search for the developments in my area of work",  $\alpha = 0.84$ ). The items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

Job satisfaction was measured using three items that correspond with those in the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cook *et al.*, 1981). A sample item is: "I am satisfied with my current work." The items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.88.

Perceived health was assessed using one item: "Generally speaking, how would you assess your health?" Respondents could answer from a 1 to 10 scale, where 1 denoted bad health and 10 optimal health. According to DeSalvo *et al.* (2009) a single item, general self-rated health measure performs as well as a more complex measurement of self-reported health.

### *Strategy of analysis*

First, the measurement model was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis. Latent variables were modeled with scale means (i.e. career competencies and job crafting) or

items (i.e. job satisfaction and proactive personality) as indicators of the latent variable. Career competencies consisted of three indicators (i.e. reflective, communicative, and behavioral competencies). Job crafting had four indicators (i.e. increasing social job resources, increasing structural job resources, increasing challenging job demands, and decreasing hindering job demands). Because health was measured with one item, this variable was included as a manifest variable.

The proposed model was tested using structural equation modeling analyses with the AMOS software package (Arbuckle, 2005). Three models were tested: a full mediation model (M1), in which no direct relationship between proactive personality and the outcomes was modeled; a partial mediation model, in which we added a direct relationship between proactive personality and both job satisfaction and perceived health (M2); and an alternative model (M3) that proposed a sequential mediation effect, in which proactive personality is related to career competencies, that, in turn relate to job satisfaction and health via job crafting. We tested this third research model to disclose whether our hypothesized model provides a better fit with our data compared to an equivalent alternative model. To assess the specific effect of both mediators separately, the phantom model approach was applied (Macho and Ledermann, 2011), through which it is possible to gain the specific indirect effect while the other mediator is also modeled.

## Results

The measurement model, including four latent variables (i.e. proactive personality, job crafting, career competencies, and job satisfaction) and health showed an acceptable fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 432.71$ ,  $df = 111$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ ,  $TLI = 0.91$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.06$ . All factor loadings were significant except for the factor loading “decreasing hindering job demands” which did not load substantially on the latent job crafting factor ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ). This indicator was therefore removed from further analyses (see also Tims *et al.*, 2016), resulting in a substantially better model fit:  $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df = 99.97/15$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $CFI = 0.95$ ,  $TLI = 0.94$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.06$ . Factor loadings ranged from 0.54 to 0.93 (all  $p$ 's  $< 0.001$ ).

The descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables can be found in Table I. The demographic variables age, education level, contract type, and occupational field were mainly correlated with increasing social resources. We therefore controlled for these variables in our analyses.

### *Testing the hypothesized model*

In line with *H1*, proactive personality related positively and significantly to job crafting ( $\gamma = 0.70$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Partially supporting *H2*, job crafting was positively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but unrelated to health ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.87$ ).

We further expected a mediating role of job crafting (*H3*) in the relationship between proactive personality and job satisfaction (*H3a*), and perceived health (*H3b*). By using phantom models (Macho and Ledermann, 2011), we tested the estimate of the specific mediating effect of job crafting in the relationship between proactive personality and job satisfaction. This was found to be significant (estimate = 0.30,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting *H3a*. Furthermore, the specific effect of job crafting in the relation between proactive personality and perceived health was not significant (estimate = 0.01,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.88$ ). Therefore, we found no support for *H3b*.

In line with *H4*, proactive personality was positively and significantly related to career competencies ( $\gamma = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). *H5* proposed that career competencies are



**Table I.**  
Descriptive statistics  
and inter-correlations  
of the study  
variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Age	25.59	4.21	–														
2. Education	2.42	0.80	0.01	–													
3. Work experience	5.40	5.75	0.49**	–0.09	–												
4. Job tenure	2.11	2.12	0.34**	–0.17**	0.36**	–											
5. Occupational field	7.66	3.02	0.08	0.01	0.03	–0.04	–										
6. Contract type	1.47	0.50	0.31**	–0.07	0.26**	0.42**	–0.06	–									
7. Proactive personality	3.66	0.51	0.04	0.08	0.01	–0.02	–0.18**	0.04	–								
8. Increasing structural job resources	3.62	0.64	–0.03	0.11*	–0.03	–0.03	–0.13**	0.08	0.51**	–							
9. Increasing social job resources	2.85	0.79	–0.17**	0.12**	–0.17**	–0.24**	–0.02	–0.08*	0.23**	0.49**	–						
10. Increasing challenging job demands	3.15	0.79	0.03	0.04	0.07	–0.04	–0.13**	0.06	0.50**	0.68**	0.50**	–					
11. Reflective career competencies	3.97	0.46	0.10*	0.00	–0.03	0.07	–0.04	0.08	0.45**	0.38**	0.23**	0.34**	–				
12. Communicative career competencies	3.55	0.59	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.00	–0.05	0.06	0.45**	0.38**	0.37**	0.37**	0.56**	–			
13. Behavioral competencies	3.66	0.62	–0.06	0.08	–0.04	–0.03	–0.05	0.02	0.45**	0.40**	0.24**	0.30**	0.47**	0.53**	–		
14. Health	3.82	0.79	–0.10*	0.06	0.02	–0.06	–0.09*	0.05	0.11*	0.15**	0.06	0.07	0.11**	0.18**	0.13**	–	
15. Job satisfaction	3.83	0.81	0.01	–0.00	–0.01	0.05	–0.02	0.10*	0.15**	0.37**	0.29**	0.23**	0.28**	0.35**	0.26**	0.18**	–

**Notes:**  $n = 574$ . \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

positively related to job satisfaction and health. Fully supporting *H5*, our results showed that career competencies were positively related to both job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$ ) and perceived health ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ).

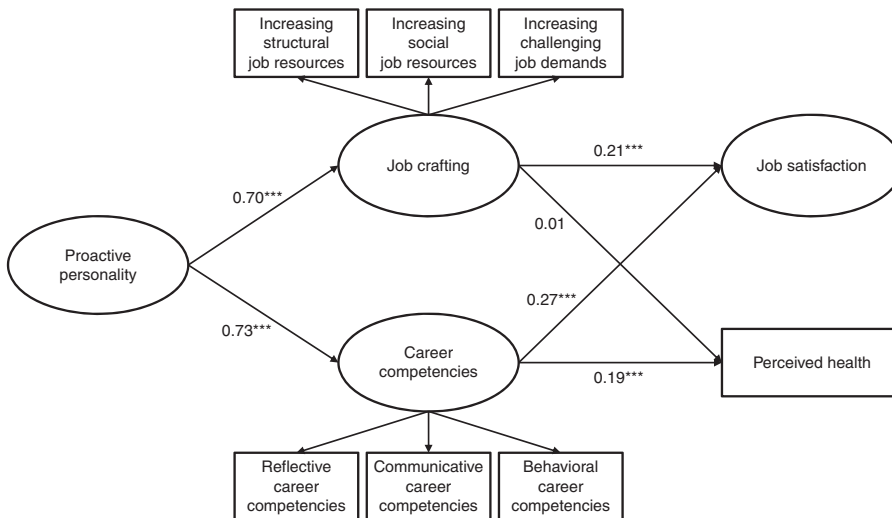
Testing the mediating role of career competencies in the relationship between proactive personality and job satisfaction (*H6a*), and perceived health (*H6b*). Phantom model analyses showed that the effect for the relationship between proactive personality and job satisfaction mediated by career competencies was indeed significant (estimate = 0.39, SE = 0.10,  $p < 0.01$ ), thereby confirming *H6a*. Furthermore, supporting *H6b* the specific effect for career competencies mediating the relationship between proactive personality and perceived health was also significant (estimate = 0.32, SE = 0.11,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Overall, the results, as depicted in Table II, revealed that our proposed double mediation model fitted the data well (M1:  $\chi^2 = 401.78, df = 147, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91$ , and RMSEA = 0.06). The estimate of the indirect effect of proactive personality on job satisfaction was 0.34 ( $p < 0.01$ ) with a confidence interval ranging between 0.28 and 0.41. The estimate of the indirect effect of proactive personality on health was 0.14,  $p < 0.01$  with a confidence interval between 0.09 and 0.20. The control variables had no significant relationship with the study variables, with the exception of the negative relationship between age and health with an estimate of 0.02 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Figure 1 shows the outcomes of our analyses concerning the proposed research model.

	$\chi^2$	df	$p$	$\Delta\chi^2/df$	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BCC
M1	401.78	147	0.000		0.93	0.91	0.93	0.06	0.06	567.78	574.14
M2	376.68	145	0.000	25.10/2**	0.94	0.91	0.94	0.05	0.05	546.68	553.19
M3	427.61	149	0.000	50.93/4**	0.92	0.90	0.92	0.06	0.06	589.61	595.82

Notes:  $n = 574$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table II.** Fit indices for the hypothesized model and alternative models ( $n = 574$ )



Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1.** Results for structural equation modeling

*Additional analyses*

To test whether the relationship between proactive personality and well-being is fully or partially mediated by job crafting and career competencies, we compared two models: a full mediation model (M1) and a partial mediation model (M2), in which also a direct relationship between proactive personality and the two outcome variables job satisfaction and health were modeled. As shown in Table II, Model 2 provided the best fit to our data with an AIC value that is lower than the AIC value of the fully mediated model (AIC M1 = 567.78 and AIC M2 = 546.68). These results indicate that job crafting and career competencies partially mediate the relationship between proactive personality and employee well-being.

An alternative model was tested to examine a different sequential mediation model in which proactive personality relates to job crafting through increased career competences, and subsequently enhances well-being. This alternative model showed the least overall fit with the data ( $\chi^2 = 427.61$ ,  $df = 149$ ,  $CFI = 0.92$ ,  $TLI = 0.90$ , and  $RMSEA = 0.06$ ,  $AIC = 589.61$ ). Based on the comparison of these three models and as shown in Table II, Model 2 provided the best fit relative to the other two models. We therefore concluded that the partially mediated model, in which job crafting and career competencies partially mediate the relationship between proactive personality and well-being is most plausible.

**Discussion**

In the present insecure work and employment environment, employees greatly benefit from a self-directed approach toward their job (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and career (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). As the economic crisis has resulted in less organizational resources and more job insecurity, and because careers have become less linear, it is of increased importance for employees to become and continue to be employable and to maintain their well-being (Silla *et al.*, 2009).

This study aimed to uncover how proactive personality plays a role in employees' well-being through both a job- and a career-related process. In line with our expectations, employees with a tendency to be proactive were more likely to engage in job crafting and to develop career-related competencies. In turn, both job crafting and career competencies were related to employee well-being.

Our results support the notion that proactive employees are likely to take initiatives to better align their job characteristics with their own preferences, skills, and abilities by crafting their job. In addition, they gain more insight in their career-related qualities and motivations, are able to expand and make better use of their network, and identify and act on possible career opportunities. Our findings demonstrate that self-directed changes in job demands and job resources, as well as the development of career-related skills and abilities are linked to higher levels of employee well-being.

We contribute to the existing research literature in two important ways. First, this study adds to the current body of knowledge on both job (re)design and career literature by examining a dual-process model. More specifically, we investigated a job- and career-related pathway in understanding employee well-being. So far, most studies on employee health and well-being have focused merely on the job level. However, our results suggest that employee well-being is not only related to job design approaches aimed at optimizing job demands and resources, such as employee proactive work behavior, but at the same time links to the development of career-related skills and abilities. Therefore, and in line with the argumentation of Hall and Las Heras (2010), management research can indeed benefit from a more integrated approach of jobs and

careers, considering that the present study shows that important work outcomes can be influenced by both domains.

Second, this is the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to demonstrate a link between career competency development and general health, and thereby combining the fields of occupational health and career development. Akkermans *et al.* (2013b) previously showed that career competencies were related to the motivational process as proposed by the JD-R theory, whereby job resources and career competencies were associated with higher levels of work engagement. Our results add to this by showing a relationship between career competencies and perceived health. This finding corresponds with the research by Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007), where they demonstrated that personal resources were related to lower levels of exhaustion, which according to Sluiter *et al.* (2003) is a primary element of subjective health. Therefore, it seems that career competencies can indeed function as a personal resource and play an active role in promoting employee well-being.

It is noteworthy that job crafting was not related to perceived health. A possible explanation for this finding could be that perceived health is a more distal outcome of job crafting compared to job satisfaction, which could be a more proximal outcome (Barnett *et al.*, 1999). More specifically, it could be the case that job satisfaction purely depends on the experience of the job, whereas a health-related construct is subject to a longer period of change.

#### *Limitations and future research*

Our study has several limitations. First, due to the cross-sectional design, we cannot make inferences about causality. Although we carefully identified the route from proactive personality to well-being based on theory and previous findings, it is possible that the causality of this relationship is reversed or reciprocal. For example, it could be that employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction and/or health are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors, such as job crafting. Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009) found evidence for a reciprocal relationship between job resources and work engagement. We therefore acknowledge the need for more data based on longitudinal research.

A second potential limitation is that the current study is based on self-reports, which can cause the problem of common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). It can be argued that the constructs we focus on are best evaluated by the individual, making it difficult to cross-validate with other-ratings. With regard to job crafting, Tims *et al.* (2012) showed that there was agreement between self-reports and peer-ratings of job crafting, indicating that self-ratings of job crafting are not likely to form a threat to the internal validity.

Interestingly, decreasing hindering job demands was not considered part of the latent job crafting factor. Furthermore, from our additional analysis it appeared that employees who reported to decrease their hindering job demands, also reported lower levels of job satisfaction. These findings suggest that decreasing hindering job demands functions in an opposite way compared to the other job crafting dimensions (for a similar account, see Tims *et al.*, 2015). Accumulating evidence seems to suggest that decreasing hindering job demands is used by employees as a strategy to deal with burnout symptoms to prevent health deterioration (e.g. Tims *et al.*, 2013) or that employees who need to decrease their job demands experience negative feelings because they feel bad about not being able to deal with these demands.

Future research could further investigate the impact of the changing nature of the contemporary work environment on the workforce and the role of employee

proactivity. For instance, the emergence of temporary work arrangements may have a great influence on the development of both jobs and careers. It is of interest to examine how the increasing temporary workforce uses proactive behaviors to adapt to the high level of uncertainty on the labor market. This also connects to the current debate on who is primarily responsible for career management. Careers have become increasingly independent and focused on individual agency (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015). Especially for temporary and self-employed workers this seems an important trend. At the same time, many employees still work for organizations and those organizations also have a responsibility to support them in their career development (Clarke, 2013). Thus, future research could focus on shedding more light on the ongoing debate between what individuals vs organizations need to do, and how organizations benefit from investing in employee development. Specifically, it would be interesting to examine the role of proactive personality and proactive behavior in relation to contextual factors such as self-employment, temporary contracts, and organizational policies.

### *Practical implications*

The findings of this study have several implications for practice. First, the results indicate that proactivity plays an important role in employee well-being. Policy makers and managers could provide employees with sufficient autonomy in the design of jobs, so that employees have the possibility to make adjustments to create a better person-job fit. Another option would be to raise awareness among employees with regard to the possibilities to engage in job crafting, as suggested by Tims *et al.* (2014). By means of training employees, they could gain insight in their job demands and job resources, and learn to identify and act on mismatches between their current job characteristics and their personal needs and preferences.

As a second implication, managers should aim to facilitate employees with tools to enhance their career-related skills and abilities, considering that the development of these career competencies are related to employee well-being. Taking into account that employees can enhance well-being through a work- and career-related pathway, it would make sense to combine HR policies related to job redesign and training and development to optimize employee well-being and thereby contribute to a sustaining and effective organization.

### **Conclusion**

The current study has demonstrated that job crafting and career competencies both mediate the relationship between proactive personality and well-being. Moreover, these findings indicate that proactive personality is not limited to either a work- or career-related outcome, but is related to both domains at the same time. As such, it shows that management researchers should take both jobs and careers into account when investigating organizational behavior topics, because proactive work behaviors and career development are both important in optimizing employees' work experiences and health, and job choices are profoundly motivated by career goals.

### **Note**

1. Additional analysis, in which we modeled the job crafting dimension decreasing hindering job demands as an additional latent factor with the six items as indicators, showed that proactive personality was unrelated to decreasing hindering job demands ( $\beta = 0.03$ ,  $p = 0.56$ ). In turn, decreasing hindering job demands was negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but unrelated to perceived health ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p = 0.62$ ).

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### About the authors

Judith Plomp is a PhD Candidate at the Amsterdam Business Research Institute (ABRI). She holds a MSc Degree in Organizational Psychology from the Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research focus encompasses topics within the domains of organizational behavior and HRM. More specifically, she examines how employees in the contemporary organizational environment use proactive behaviors to optimize both their work- and career-related outcomes. In addition, she is interested in the differences between permanent and temporary employees concerning motivation, job crafting behaviors, work engagement, and career development. Judith Plomp is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: j.plomp@vu.nl



Maria Tims is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of the VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In her research, she focuses on job crafting, employee well-being and performance, and social dynamics in (project) teams. She uses different quantitative and qualitative research methods in her studies. Tims has publications in, for example, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, and *Applied Psychology: An International Review*.

Jos Akkermans is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior at the VU Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His main research interests focus on career development, employability, school-to-work transition, and employee well-being. He has published about these topics in high profile journals such as *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Human Resource Management*, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, and *Applied Psychology: An International Review*. Jos is a Board Member of the Netherlands Foundation for Management Development, he is the current Newsletter Editor of the *Academy of Management* Careers Division, and he is an active Reviewer for many international peer-reviewed journals.

Svetlana N. Khapova is a Professor of Careers and Organization Studies and Scientific Director of Amsterdam Business Research Institute at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She is Past Division Chair of the Careers Division of the *Academy of Management*. Her research concerns contemporary issues in work and careers, and was published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Vocation Behavior*, *Human Relations*, *Career Development International*, and many others. Her new book *An Intelligent Career: Taking Ownership of Your Work and Your Life* (Oxford University Press) co-authored with M.B. Arthur and J. Richardson, and will appear in 2017.

Paul G.W. Jansen is a Professor of Industrial Psychology, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He has published over 60 scholarly articles and chapters, and (co)edited 18 books. Paul G.W. Jansen is one of the Founders, and current Board Member of the "HRM Network NL." His research interests are in management development, careers, assessment (e.g. assessment centers, 360-graden feedback) and performance management. Publications in, for example, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *Psychometrika*, *Applied Psychological Measurement*, *Journal of Organizational and Occupational Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, and *Journal of Management Studies*.

Arnold B. Bakker, PhD, is a Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology and the Director of the Center of Excellence for Positive Organizational Psychology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He is also distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, and Adjunct Professor at the Lingnan University, Hong Kong. Dr Bakker is Past President of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology. He is interested in work engagement, job crafting, and job performance. Dr Bakker is Editor of *Current Issues in Work and Organizational Psychology* (Psychology Press), and *Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology* (Emerald).

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